

CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE OF THE ROCKY BOY'S  
RESERVATION

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 244  
INTRODUCED BY JONATHAN WINDY BOY

“AN ACT DELEGATING AUTHORITY TO THE GOVERNOR  
TO NEGOTIATE TRIBAL-STATE GAMING COMPACTS  
THAT ALLOW AUTHORIZED CLASS III GAMING FOR  
PLAY EXCLUSIVELY ON INDIAN LANDS AND FOR THE  
EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF MONTANA INDIAN  
TRIBES; AMENDING SECTION 23-5-112, MCA; AND  
PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE AND AN  
APPLICABILITY DATE”

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY:  
DUSTIN WHITFORD, BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEMBER  
CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE

PRESENTED TO:  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS, LABOR, AND  
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

FEBRUARY 8, 2013  
MONTANA STATE CAPITOL ROOM 422  
HELENA, MONTANA

9 AM

## INTRODUCTION

Good Morning, Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Business, Labor and Economic Affairs and recognize my fellow tribal member and friend, Senator Jonathan Windy Boy. My name is Dustin Whitford, and I serve as a Business Committee Member for the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation. As a newly elected tribal official for my reservation, I see the many challenges we have in Indian country and especially in the more rural areas of our state. Indian gaming is one of the opportunities that tribes have available due to the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act or IGRA in 1987.

In Montana, as most of you may already know, tribes have not had much success in negotiating Class III tribal-state gaming compacts with gaming other than what is already being offered off-reservation. The ability to provide something new and innovative

is what we need on our rural reservations in order to attract gamblers, tourists and other patrons to our Indian casinos.

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Senate Committee members, SB 244 provides tribes with that opportunity, it doesn't guarantee instant success because that can only be achieved if we all work together to make it happen through tribal and state relations like we are having today. Tribes are reaching out to the Senate Committee and communicating our need for economic development. Montana tribes need SB 244, my reservation needs SB 244 in order to provide the opportunity for a job to our tribal members and non-tribal members in northcentral Montana.

On behalf of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, I am asking the Senate Committee to extend your support and consideration for SB 244 and help us achieve the success we desperately need on our reservations. If given the chance, I firmly believe we can make gaming work for our rural reservations by attracting patrons through providing innovative new Class III games but we need your help and support in order to do this. It is a proven fact that

Indian gaming improves economic conditions on our reservations and the economic benefits reach outside the reservation as well into the surrounding communities and ultimately statewide in terms of the various vendors that we'll need to provide the Class III gaming opportunities that SB 244 will bring.

The Rocky Boy's reservation lies approximately 50 miles south of the Canadian border in northcentral Montana with unemployment rates between 65 and 90 percent depending on the time of the year. SB 244 will enable my tribe to continue developing our current casino and create employment opportunities for our tribal members and surrounding non-tribal members as well. It's another proven fact that having a job improves an individual's self-esteem and confidence, especially within low income communities, the ability to provide for your family is priceless in our reservation communities and in our state in general. You can imagine what it feels like to not have a job and forced to rely on tribal and state public benefits in order to



survive. SB 244 will lessen our reliance on state welfare programs, such as

SB 244 clarifies the Governor's authority to negotiate Class III tribal-state gaming compacts on a government-to-government basis with our tribal governments here in Montana. We currently operate the Northern Winz Casino on my reservation and it has not been easy due to several reasons. The legislation gives both the State of Montana and tribal governments the ability to negotiate for a greater variety of Class III gaming devices in our tribal-state gaming compacts. If passed, SB 244 will only apply to reservations in Montana and does not expand gaming under state law for off-reservation casino's in Montana.

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Senate Committee members, gambling is obviously not a panacea for every problem faced by tribes in Montana. But it has had a huge, positive impact on the number of available jobs and provides a source of revenue for tribal governmental operations, tribal education programs and assist in provide adequate healthcare for our tribal members.

I could go on and on, however I know you have important work ahead of you and please I urge you all to keep up the good work you do for all of us Montanans, including our Indian people residing on our reservations in Montana.

On behalf of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's reservation, I urge you to seriously consider the benefits SB 244 will have for tribal governments and our surrounding communities and support the passage of SB 244. The benefits we can achieve will help tribal leaders to restore the federal budget reductions that will cripple the desperately needed services for our tribal members and create employment opportunities for state citizens and our native american populations in Montana. Lastly, I would like to thank the Honorable Chairman and Senate Committee Members for allowing me to testify today. Thank you.